

Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

Vol 45 Jan. 2017

Thoughts from Dr. Amy

What's the Best Exercise to Reduce Your Waistline & Heart Attack Risk?

Happy New Year! If one of your resolutions is to flatten your belly, congratulations on making an important commitment to improve your arterial health! Large studies show that having a large waistline (above 40 inches for a man and above 35 inches for a woman) can more than double risk for heart disease and more than triple it for type 2 diabetes, even if your weight and body mass index (BMI) are normal. In fact, [scientists report](#) that excessive belly fat is just as bad for your heart as smoking!



The wonderful news is that losing just 2 inches from your waist can significantly lower blood pressure, cholesterol and other heart attack risks, [a 6-month study](#) found. Here's a look at which workouts target belly fat effectively--and which ones don't. Check with your healthcare provider before starting a new exercise regimen to make sure it's appropriate for you.

- **Abdominal exercise.** While it might seem logical that abdominal exercises, such as sit-ups and crunches, would be the best way to flatten your belly, unfortunately, spot reducing doesn't work. In [a 6-week study](#), this type of workout had no impact on participants' waist size or the amount of fat they carried around the middle. However, numerous studies show that other types of exercise can lead to major reductions in belly bulge, along with other improvements in cardiovascular health.
- **Interval training.** If you have insulin resistance (the root cause of type 2 diabetes and 70% of heart attacks) or metabolic syndrome (a cluster of heart attack risks that often includes too much belly fat), research shows that the most effective way to combat these problems is interval training, in which you alternate short bursts of more intense activity with intervals of lighter activity. In [a study of overweight people](#), this type of exercise resulted in overall weight loss, a slimmer waist, improved lipid levels, and a 32.5% reduction in rates of metabolic syndrome.
- **Brisk walking.** In [a 12-week study](#), previously sedentary people who walked briskly for 30 minutes a day, five days a week, whittled their waists by about an inch, enjoyed a 6-point drop in

their systolic blood pressure (the top number) and reduced their hip measurement by an inch. An [earlier study](#) also found that walking reduces both total and LDL (bad) cholesterol by about 5%. Other research reports that walking briskly for 3 or more hours a week cuts risk for heart disease by up to 50%.

- **Strength training.** Including weight lifting in your workout not only tones your muscles, but it can also help prevent age-related gain in waist size, according to [a 2014 Harvard study](#). A similar study of women found that over a two-year period, strength training twice a week prevented increases in belly fat. That's because larger, stronger muscles help rev up metabolism, so you burn more calories even when you're at rest. To avoid injury, start with lighter weights and gradually build up to heavier ones as you gain strength.
- **Aerobics plus strength training.** The best way to keep your heart healthy is to combine aerobic exercise, such as walking, jogging, cycling, or swimming, with muscle strengthening activities, such as lifting weights or resistance training. The American Heart Association advises at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity at least 5 days a week, plus moderate-to-high-intensity strength training twice a week. Both types of exercise help dieters [avoid regaining belly fat after weight loss](#), suggesting that regular workouts are essential for maintaining a healthy weight--and waistline.

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Heart Attack & Stroke Prevention Center

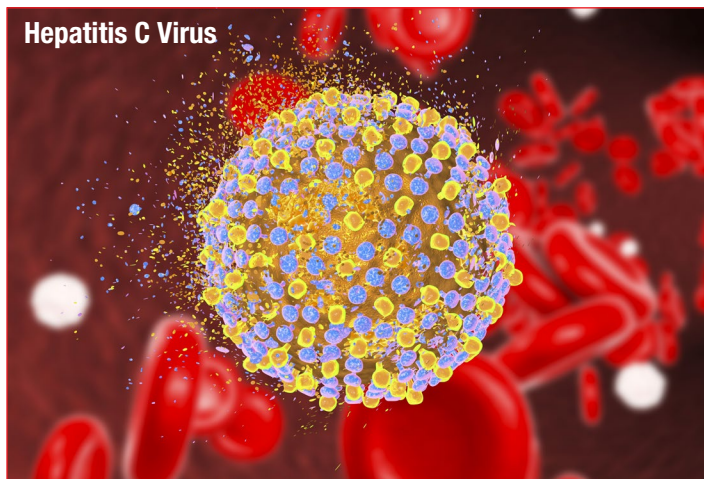
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The Forgotten Heart Risk that Affects Millions of Americans



Sometimes called “the forgotten virus,” hepatitis C (HCV) can not only damage the liver, but the infection is also putting millions of Americans at increased risk for heart disease, according to new research presented at the [Bale Doneen Method Post Preceptorship Monthly Scientific Updates](#) for healthcare providers. Chronic HCV is estimated to affect 2.7 to 3.9 million Americans, many of whom are unaware that they harbor the virus, which often causes no symptoms for years or even decades.

Up to 85% of those infected with HCV develop the chronic form, which can have serious or fatal complications if untreated. A 2016 study found that having chronic HCV raises risk for coronary artery disease (CAD)--plaque in the arteries that can lead to a heart attack or stroke--by 26%. However, there are now effective treatments for HCV--and a proven method to reduce or prevent its associated cardiovascular risks. Here's what you need to know to protect your heart and liver health.

Who is at highest risk for HCV?

Baby Boomers are at the greatest risk for HCV, a blood-borne infection that is six times more prevalent in this age group. Indeed, three out of four new cases are diagnosed in those born between 1945 and 1965, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which [recommends that everyone born in these years get tested for HCV](#). Several blood tests are available to check for signs of HCV infection, such as having antibodies to the virus in your bloodstream. For more information, discuss screening with your medical provider.

How is this disease spread?

HCV is usually spread through exposure to an infected person's blood, which can occur by sharing needles or other equipment used to inject drugs, being born to a mother with the disease, sharing certain personal care items--such as razors or toothbrushes--that are tainted with an infected person's blood, or getting a blood transfusion or organ donation before 1992, when widespread screening of the blood supply began. It's also possible, though uncommon, to catch HCV through sex. If you have any of these risks, discuss testing with your medical provider--particularly if you've EVER used IV drugs, even once, many years ago.

What kind of complications can HCV cause?

If untreated, HCV can lead to severe liver disease (cirrhosis). About 45% of untreated patients are expected to develop this condition by 2030, a

new study projects. HCV ranks as the leading cause of liver cancer and liver transplants and is an independent risk factor for CAD. We recommend that anyone diagnosed with HCV get a full Bale Doneen workup to check for arterial disease, even if he or she appears healthy. Early detection and treatment of CAD can be lifesaving, by preventing heart attacks and strokes!

How is chronic HCV treated and is there a shot to prevent it?

There are several medications available to treat chronic HCV, including new drugs that are more effective--with fewer side effects--than previous therapies. To reduce or prevent liver damage, people with the disease should avoid alcohol and not take any medication--even supplements or over-the-counter drugs--without consulting their medical provider. There's no vaccine available yet to prevent HCV. Vaccines are available to protect against two other viruses: hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

Herb Chicken with Spinach and Tomatoes

Ready in just 20 minutes, this tasty one-skillet recipe is low in calories, yet packed with heart-healthy nutrients. Studies [show that tomatoes help reduce inflammation, blood pressure, and levels of oxidized LDL](#), a form of bad cholesterol that can lead to plaque in the arteries. In addition, researchers report that people whose diet is high in lycopene (the compound that gives tomatoes their bright-red color) have significantly [lower risk for stroke](#).



Recipes for the heart

Ingredients

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 tablespoon olive or avocado oil | 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder |
| 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts | 1/2 teaspoon pepper |
| 8 ounces of fresh, baby spinach leaves | 1 1/2 ounce can of low-sodium chopped tomatoes, with juice |
| 1 medium onion, diced | 1/4 cup low-sodium chicken broth, dry white wine or balsamic vinegar |
| 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano leaves | |
| 1/2 teaspoon dried basil | |

Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add chicken and cook 4-5 minutes per side, or until browned and juices from the thickest part of the chicken run clear. Remove chicken from pan and set aside. Reduce heat to medium and cook spinach until just wilted, about 2 minutes. Remove from pan and add onion. Cook for 5 minutes, until softened, then add all remaining ingredients. Bring to a simmer and cook 5 minutes, stirring frequently.

Place spinach on a serving dish and top with chicken breasts and herb-tomato sauce. Serve with brown rice, couscous, quinoa or your favorite pasta. Makes 4 servings. Adapted from [Bettycrocker.com](#) and [McCormick.com](#).